Missouri Department of Natural Resources

Water Conservation –
What You Can do to Help

Droughts are unique among natural disasters. Unlike tornadoes, thunderstorms, hurricanes, floods and earthquakes, they are not violent, but they can be costly, and the heat that accompanies them can be deadly. Only after a drought has been weeks in the making does anyone recognize it, making it difficult to prepare for one. Once a drought takes hold, water conservation is the only weapon at our disposal. The measures listed below are suggestions for wise water use. They are listed by use and condition. Naturally, all such measures are even more appropriate during worsening drought conditions.

Indoor Residential Use

- Use dishwashers only when they are full. Washing dishes by hand (don't let the tap run!) saves about 25 gallons.
- Adjust water level on clothes washing machines, if possible. Use full loads only if not adjustable.
- Turn off faucets while brushing teeth, etc. This saves about 5 gallons per day.
- Reduce water used per flush by installing toilet tank displacement inserts. A plastic jug can be used as an alternative. Do not use bricks as they can disintegrate when soaked and the resulting grit hinders closing of the flap valve.
- Use sink and tub stoppers to avoid wasting water.
- Keep a bottle of chilled water in the refrigerator for drinking.
- Find and fix leaks in toilets, which can leak silently. One can test for leakage by placing a drop of food coloring in the upper tank and do not flush for 30 minutes. If color appears in the bowl, there is leakage.
- Find and fix leaks in faucets and appliances that use water. Faucets can usually be fixed cheaply and quickly by replacing washers.
- Adapt plumbing with flow-restricting or other water-saving devices. These are usually inexpensive and easy to install.
- Learn to read your water meter to judge how much water you use.
- Take shorter showers and shallower baths. This saves about 25 gallons.
- Reduce the number of toilet flushes per day. Each flush uses about 5 gallons (2-3 gallons if you have water-saving toilets).
- Don't use a garbage disposal.
- Use non-phosphate detergent and save laundry water for lawns and plants.
- Turn off shower while soaping up.

Outdoor Residential Use

Lawns
- Water before 10:00 A.M. to prevent evaporation, which occurs during the hottest part of the day. Morning is better than evening, when the dampness encourages growth of fungus.
- Water only when lawn shows signs of wilt. Grass that springs back when stepped on does not need water.
- Water lawn thoroughly, not frequently; long enough to soak roots. A light sprinkling evaporates quickly and encourages shallow root systems. Water slowly to avoid runoff.
- Do not let the sprinkler run any longer than necessary. In an hour, 600 gallons can be wasted.
- Allow maximum of one inch of water per week on your lawn. To measure, place cake tins outside to collect rain and water from sprinklers.
- Use pistol-grip nozzles on hoses to avoid waste when watering flowers and shrubs.
- Aerate lawns by punching holes 6 inches apart. This allows water to reach roots rather than run off surfaces.
- Mow Kentucky bluegrass no shorter than 2 to 3 inches high, to hold moisture.
- Position sprinklers to water the lawn, not the pavement.
- Avoid watering on windy days when the wind not only blows water off target, but also causes excess evaporation.
- Keep sprinkler heads clean to prevent uneven watering.
- Adjust hose to simulate a gentle rain. Sprinklers that produce a fine mist waste water through evaporation.
- Know how to turn off an automatic sprinkler system in case of rain.
- Use an alarm clock or stove timer to remind you to shut off sprinklers that don't have timers.

Vegetable and Flower Gardens
- Keep soil loose so water can penetrate easily.
- Use mulch around plants and between rows to hold in moisture.
- Keep weeds out to reduce competition for water.
- Put the water where you want it and avoid evaporation by using soil-soakers or slow-running hoses, not sprinklers.

Trees and Shrubs
- Water trees and shrubs deeply using a soil-soaker.
- Water only when needed. Check the depth of soil dryness by digging with a trowel. While the ground surface may be dry, adequate moisture may be retained beneath the surface.
- Mulch ground surface to reduce evaporation. A 2 to 3 inch layer of wood chips, pine needles, grass clippings, or straw keeps the soil cool in summer. Mulch adds landscape interest and reduces weeds, and the few weeds that do grow are easy to uproot.
- Dig troughs around plants to catch and retain water.
- Water plants growing in full sun more often than those in shade.
- Do not use sprinklers. Apply water directly at base of plant.
- Do not fertilize during the summer. Fertilizing increases a plants need for water.
- Postpone planting until fall or spring when there is generally less need for water.
- Install trickle-drip irrigation systems close to the roots of your plants. By dripping water slowly, the system doesn't spray water into the air where it can be lost through evaporation. Use soil probes for large trees.
- Water when it is cloudy, at night, or even when a light rain is falling.

- Do not allow children to play with hose or sprinklers.
- Limit washing driveways, vehicles, machinery, etc.
- Be ready to catch rainfall that occurs. Place containers under downspouts.
- Use leftover household water, if available.
- Consider delaying the seeding or sodding of new lawns.
- Determine the amount of water being used outdoors by comparing water bills for the summer and winter.
- Vegetable gardens and food trees should be given minimal amounts of water on an individual basis only.
- Do not water lawns and inedible plants.
- Do not use sprinklers.
- Most outdoor watering is prohibited under emergency conditions.

For More Information

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www.dnr.mo.gov/geology/droughtupdate.htm

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